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TAGS: [ECON](#) [KHIV](#) [KWMN](#) [SMIG](#) [SOCI](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: LESOTHO: 2006 CENSUS PREVIEW SHOWS POPULATION TRENDS

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**¶11. SUMMARY:** On July 5, Lesotho's Minister of Finance and Development Planning shared with multilateral and bilateral donor missions an advance excerpt from the country's 2006 housing and population census, compiled by the nation's Bureau of Statistics (BOS). The long-awaited census figures, showing a negligible population increase over the past decade, demonstrate the impact of several factors -- first among them HIV/AIDS. The census also shows an increase in Lesotho's urban population and an expansion of Lesotho's female population at roughly twice the rate of that of males. However, the headline news of the census is Lesotho's stagnating population of 1.88 million, validating World Bank and UNAIDS projections which factored in a heavy death toll due to HIV/AIDS. END SUMMARY.

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Finally, the Census  
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**¶12.** The international community, political parties, and other stakeholders had long demanded the results of Lesotho's much delayed 2006 housing and population census, compiled by the Bureau of Statistics (BOS). On July 5, Lesotho's Minister of Finance and Development Planning Dr. Timothy Thahane shared an advanced excerpt of the census with Maseru-based donor missions. The 2006 census is the nation's fifth since independence in [1966](#). While the figures shared were preliminary, Minister Thahane stated that the final figures, to be published in December 2007 with additional data and analysis, would not differ significantly.

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The Numbers  
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**¶13.** The preliminary census results reveal that the total number of persons living in Lesotho in 2006 was 1.88 million, compared to 1.86 million in 1996. This represents a tiny increase of 0.9% in population during the inter-census period. When broken out by sex, 964,379 female and 916,282 male residents were recorded in 2006, leading to a male/female sex ratio works of 95%. In 1996, records showed 952,250 females and 910,025 males,

creating a male/female sex ratio of 95.6%. This indicates an expansion of Lesotho's female population at roughly twice that of males by absolute numbers.

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Creeping Urbanization  
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¶4. Over the last decade, 5.9% of Lesotho's residents moved from rural to urban areas. Lesotho's total urban population increased from 17.1% in 1996 to 23% in 2006. Lesotho's largest districts remain Maseru and Leribe, with 23% and 16% of the total population respectively. According to the census, a very small 0.5% of Lesotho's population lives in institutional settings (i.e., prisons or college dormitories), and each of Lesotho's eighty political constituencies claims between 1% and 2% of the total population.

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The Impact of AIDS  
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¶5. COMMENT: Both the World Bank and UNAIDS had predicted virtually static population growth in Lesotho due to the impact of HIV/AIDS. The 2006 census proved them right -- the already low 2% population growth of 1986-1996 has been significantly

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stunted. Minister of Finance Thahane blamed this on the HIV/AIDS pandemic, migration to South Africa, and family planning. Even without definitive numbers available, it seems that HIV/AIDS is the first among these causes. On the political front, the differences between the largest (37,000) and smallest (17,000) electoral constituencies indicates the need for redistricting - which is bound to be a hot political potato.  
END COMMENT.

MURPHY